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Security Council

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New York

President:	Mr. Wolff	(United States of America)
Members:	Belgium	Mrs. Delieux
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Koudougou
	China	Mr. La Yifan
	Costa Rica	Mr. Weisleder
	Croatia	Mr. Vilović
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Indonesia	Mr. Kleib
	Italy	Mr. Azzarello
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Dabbashi
	Panama	Mr. Suescum
	Russian Federation	Mr. Dolgov
	South Africa	Ms. Qwabe
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Quarrey
	Viet Nam	Mr. Bui The Giang

Agenda

The situation in Guinea-Bissau

Report of the Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau and on the activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in that country (S/2008/395)

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08-39896 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 11.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Guinea-Bissau

Report of the Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau and on the activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in that country (S/2008/395)

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Guinea-Bissau, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Cabral (Guinea-Bissau) took a seat at the Council table.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Shola Omoregie, Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Omoregie to take a seat at the Council table.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and Director-General of the United Nations Office in Vienna.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Costa to take a seat at the Council table.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mrs. Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti, Chair of the Guinea-Bissau configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission and Permanent Representative of Brazil.

It is so decided.

I invite Mrs. Viotti to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2008/395, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau and on the activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in that country.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear briefings by Mr. Shola Omoregie, Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau; Mr. Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and Director-General of the United Nations Office in Vienna; and Mrs. Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti, Chair of the Guinea-Bissau configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission and Permanent Representative of Brazil.

I give the floor to Mr. Shola Omoregie, Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau.

Mr. Omoregie: The report before the Council, contained in document S/2008/395, is the latest report of the Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau and the activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS).

The report focuses in particular on constraints at the socio-political level and, among other things, highlights progress in the implementation of security sector reform, the engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission, preparations for legislative elections

scheduled for November this year, and economic recovery efforts.

I should like to say just a few words to update the Council on developments since the report was published. Although the political and economic situation in Guinea-Bissau remains fragile, some recent developments bring much promise. The country has seen a slight improvement in its economic performance indicators, evidenced by an increase in agricultural production, including cashew nut exports, and the setting-up of mechanisms for improved revenue collection and the maintenance of fiscal stability.

In that connection, if economic performance indicators continue to improve, Guinea-Bissau could, by the end of the year, become eligible for the International Monetary Fund's Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative and for debt relief under the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative. Those facilities, in combination with similar debt-relief initiatives of the World Bank and the African Development Bank, will reduce the volume of the country's regular debt-service payments, allowing improved investment in the social sectors and in economic revitalization.

However, the aforementioned positive prognosis is threatened by structural limitations in internal revenue generation and fiscal management. An accounts audit of the General Directorate of Customs, Taxes and the Treasury, sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and covering the period 2004 to 2007, concluded that a substantial amount of duties and taxes had not been collected and that very few companies had declared their commercial activities.

The report makes a number of recommendations, such as the deferment of payment of 2007 arrears; the routing of State expenditure payments exclusively through the treasury; the centralization of State revenue collection through the Central Bank of West African States; further restrictions on extra-budgetary spending; and finally, computerized treasury operations, including payroll management, by the end of 2008. If implemented, those recommendations could improve the State's revenue collection system and reduce its financial deficits. UNDP plans to initiate a second-phase audit of State expenditure by the end of June.

In addition, the limited progress on the economic front could be jeopardized by deepening institutional tension between Government institutions and the main political parties. The holding of the legislative elections is vital to consolidating the democratic process. However, jockeying for power threatens to exacerbate latent political tensions among the three political parties signatories to the Political and Government Stability Pact of March 2007.

The Pact, which underpins the current Government, is itself undermined by splits within the three major signatory parties. While disagreements between party leaders and the Prime Minister have abated, tensions between the political factions are likely to increase in the run-up to the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) congress and leadership contest to be held on 26 and 28 June. The leader of the PAIGC and former Prime Minister, Mr. Carlos Gomes Jr., has already indicated his intention to seek a review of the Political Stability Pact. He has also expressed some mistrust and questioned the fairness and transparency of the electoral process, particularly with regard to the role of the Party for Social Renewal (PRS).

Opposition political parties have also stepped up their criticism of the Government's performance, with accusations ranging from corruption to apathy towards the general deterioration of the living conditions of the citizens. Those condemnations were intensified by a wave of strikes in the public sector in the past four weeks due to the inability of the Government to pay salary arrears and spikes in the prices of food and other consumer items. Although the Government was able to pay two out of four months of salary arrears on 18 June, social discontent is likely to continue and be exploited in the electoral process.

Preparations for the legislative elections scheduled for 16 November 2008 have been undermined by, among other things, bureaucratic lapses and limited human and financial resources. On 5 June, Prime-Minister N'Dafa Cabi announced the Government's intention to conduct manual voter registration for the elections. Subsequently, the Secretary of State for Territorial Administration announced that voter registration would take place between 3 and 24 July 2008. Although the manual voter registration exercise is scheduled to start on 3 July 2008, it was only on 23 June that UNDP concluded a memorandum of understanding with the National Institute of Statistics and Census to start the recruitment and training of electoral officials and the

procurement of material and equipment. It is therefore uncertain whether voter registration will take place as scheduled or whether all logistical and civic education activities will be conducted in a timely manner and as efficiently as desirable for elections to be held as scheduled and without compromising the credibility of the whole process. I continue to encourage all concerned to accelerate their efforts in order to avoid delays in the electoral calendar.

At the request of the Government, UNOGBIS will coordinate international observation, while UNDP will continue to provide technical assistance. In that connection, UNDP has held working-level meetings with representatives of the National Electoral Commission, the National Institute of Statistics, the Technical Support Office for Elections and regional electoral commissions. The European Union is expected to deploy some electoral observers, as recommended by its mission that visited Guinea-Bissau in the first week of June.

The engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission — covering short-term, medium-term and long-term activities — provides an important context for deepening international assistance to the Government. Through the short-term peace consolidation process under the Peacebuilding Fund, the Guinea-Bissau Peacebuilding Fund National Steering Committee recently approved four quick-win projects covering electoral support, youth employment, the rehabilitation of military barracks and the rehabilitation of prisons. With the approval of the four projects, steps are currently being taken to finalize the Guinea-Bissau Peacebuilding Fund priority plan.

Consultations are also ongoing to finalize the strategic framework for peacebuilding in Guinea-Bissau, which will synthesize the medium- to long-term engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission. The strategic framework will integrate the experiences and analyses derived from the four missions conducted in the country by Commission's country-specific configuration on Guinea-Bissau and the Peacebuilding Support Office, as well as consultations between the United Nations and various stakeholders. The consultations have been intense, and have included weekly and fortnightly thematic discussions by video link between New York Headquarters and stakeholders in Guinea-Bissau. The consultations have focused on priority areas identified by the Government as peacebuilding challenges, namely, the reform of the public administration, the consolidation of the rule of law and security sector reform, technical professional training and youth employment, and support for vulnerable social groups. The strategic framework, which is expected to be completed in July, will set the context for the announcement by the Secretary-General of a larger envelope of financial assistance for Guinea-Bissau. That will formalize the envisaged continuous engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission as an advocacy platform for resource mobilization and a coordinating mechanism for multi-partner efforts at peace consolidation and post-conflict reconstruction.

To strengthen national stakeholder involvement, in particular by women's groups, in the engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission in Guinea-Bissau, UNOGBIS and its partners held a round of regional consultations throughout May, which were capped with a three-day national workshop held from 17 to 19 June. The activities were aimed at mainstreaming gender issues and enhancing the participation of women in peace consolidation, as provided for in resolution 1325 (2000). Recommendations from the national workshop will be integrated into the strategic framework for peacebuilding in Guinea-Bissau.

The initiation of implementation of the security sector reform programme, with support from the European Union, marked an important milestone. The ongoing deployment in Guinea-Bissau of a team of 15 civilian and military personnel from the European Union, under the framework of the European Security and Defence Policy, in support of security sector reform is a major step towards the operationalization of the national programme for security sector reform.

Another important benchmark was the armed forces census, which was conducted in March and revealed a total of 4,493 military personnel — almost half earlier estimates of 9,000. That number is expected to be reduced to 3,440 under the armed forces rationalization and modernization plan within the security sector reform programme. The rationalization will be facilitated by information revealed by the census that more than 1,000 current military personnel would prefer voluntary demobilization. In the context of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration component within the larger security sector reform programme, UNOGBIS and its partners are finalizing arrangements for a pilot vocational training project in Brazil for 30 selected senior military officers. The

training of those senior officers will enable the start of security sector reform.

When I last briefed members in March, I referred to arrangements between UNOGBIS, the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) to organize a security sector reform resource-mapping exercise with partners in order to identify gaps in donor support for security sector reform and make recommendations to address such gaps. I am pleased to report that the resource-mapping exercise took place in New York on 22 and 23 May. The exercise recommended focused support for the adoption of a legal framework for the Ministries of the Interior and Justice, including training in criminal investigation for the various law-enforcement bodies, the provision of operational equipment to the police, the establishment of a financial intelligence unit, the creation and training of a specialized police force to combat terrorism and transnational organized crime, the ratification and domestication of relevant international conventions, and addressing relationship issues within the security sector reform process.

In the follow-up to the security sector reform resource-mapping exercise, an assessment mission led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) is expected to visit Guinea-Bissau in the coming weeks.

Following consultations held since last year with national authorities, UNOGBIS, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and UNDP will be organizing a workshop for law enforcement institutions in August this year aimed at explaining jurisdictions, responsibilities and competencies and enhancing interdepartmental cooperation.

The campaign against drug trafficking and organized crime received a boost with the signature on 16 June of the financial agreement between the European Community and the UNODC for a €2-million justice and security programme. The programme will, inter alia, support the creation of a special anti-narcotics unit within the judiciary police and the strengthening of its operational capacities in intelligence-gathering and information-sharing for the detection and prosecution of offenders.

Drug trafficking cannot be combated without subregional and international cooperation. Efforts to address this scourge in Guinea-Bissau should be complemented by initiatives in neighbouring States. Otherwise, successful regulation in one State would lead to relocation of the criminals into another, less regulated, national territory in the region. Criminals are able to operate with impunity where States have little capacity, where judicial systems are flawed and where international cooperation mechanisms are weak, so that they cannot, for example, be extradited. If the anti-narcotics capacity of local law enforcement agencies is strengthened to detect and apprehend drug traffickers, they will still need improved international cooperation in order to speedily extradite those wanted in other countries and/or to prosecute them locally.

Realizing the importance of regional cooperation, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) will hold a regional conference on drug trafficking in October 2008 in Cape Verde in order to share experiences and develop a common strategic approach. UNOGBIS, in close cooperation with the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) and UNODC will facilitate this event.

The human rights situation in Guinea-Bissau remains an issue of concern, especially in relation to the absence of and weak institutional mechanisms for the protection and promotion of human rights. Activities in the social, economic and political fields, including security sector reform, should be complemented by a strong commitment to the development of a human rights culture, which is imperative for the sustainability of the current international effort. I have requested the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to strengthen the human rights component of UNOGBIS so that it can more effectively play its role in the areas of monitoring, capacity-building and technical cooperation.

To conclude, I would like to highlight some key points. The second quarter of 2008 witnessed a surge in economic activities, accompanied by growing confidence by the Bretton Woods institutions in Guinea-Bissau's economic performance indicators. In order to support and consolidate this positive trend, the United Nations system should continue to support reforms in both administrative and economic governance.

Although the implementation of the security sector reform programme has commenced, only about a third of the proposed total budget has been pledged.

Additionally, there is a perception that security sector reform is a defence-related reform, evidenced by lopsided donor support for the defence sector. That misperception should be addressed. A holistic approach to security sector reform that integrates judiciary, law enforcement and oversight mechanisms is advised, especially given the threats posed by international organized crime. The current security sector reform strategy should also integrate an anti-narcotics component linking diverse law enforcement agencies and inter-ministerial departments.

Limited resources remain a challenge in the efforts to combat drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau. During the International Conference on Drug Trafficking in Guinea-Bissau, held in Lisbon in December 2007, the Government presented an anti-narcotics operational plan for 2007-2010. Out of a total projected budget of $19.1 million, only $6.7 million was pledged. There is an urgent need to cover the shortfall of $12.4 million to ensure the complete implementation of the programme. Additionally, the anti-narcotics efforts could benefit from more stringent and practical preventive measures, such as the naming and shaming of individuals involved in drug trafficking and organized crime in Guinea-Bissau, as well as their collaborators in foreign countries. The Prime Minister of Guinea-Bissau today submitted evidence relating to persons who are involved in drug trafficking to the Prosecutor General of Guinea-Bissau for action. I think that the Council can help the Government by taking action to support its efforts in this direction.

Failure to hold elections as scheduled on 16 November 2008 would create a legal and constitutional vacuum and unleash consequences that could unravel ongoing efforts at socio-economic recovery and political stabilization. However, this important milestone for consolidation of democracy is threatened by limited resources. According to the latest figures provided by the UNDP, there is a funding gap of $1.9 million out of the total election costs, which are estimated at $8.56 million. This includes pledged contributions; if the pledged contributions are removed, the gap will be about $4.5 million. The international community is strongly encouraged to assist in covering this dreadful funding gap.

There is a need for improved international assistance to the Government in establishing an effective national human rights protection system as a bulwark against the existing culture of abuses and violations. It is hoped that the High Commissioner for Human Rights will seize the opportunity provided under the current initiatives to strengthen the human rights role of UNOGBIS.

Finally, Guinea-Bissau faces key challenges and difficulties in the following areas: reduction of social and political tensions and overcoming difficulties in political cohabitation among not only the organs of State — the executive, the legislature, the judiciary and the presidency — but also within the ranks of some of the main political parties. Failure to sustain ongoing efforts to address these difficulties and challenges would undermine national programmes for political stabilization, socio-economic development and sustainable peace.

The President: I thank Mr. Omoregie for his briefing.

I encourage speakers to keep their statements to no more than five minutes.

I now give the floor to Mr. Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and Director-General of the United Nations Office in Vienna.

Mr. Costa: I appreciate the concern that the Security Council continues to show for the situation in Guinea-Bissau and am honoured to be invited to participate in its deliberations. On today's agenda is not only a serious drug issue in one country, but also the acute threat that transnational organized crime is posing to regional security in West Africa.

The first manifestation of this threat was in Cape Verde a few years ago; this was blocked by rapid intervention. For a couple of years now, the threat has metastasized to Guinea-Bissau and could soon spread elsewhere in the region. This Security Council meeting will reassure the people of Western Africa that the international community has not abandoned them. This impression of being abandoned was shared with me by the most senior Government officials in the region recently. Next week, in the Republic of Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria and Senegal — countries I intend to visit — I hope to hear a more positive commentary as a result of this meeting of the Security Council. And, of course, we will be offering to deliver to them an even greater degree of assistance.

Today's Security Council deliberations will motivate the entire world community to assist

West Africa in withstanding the onslaught of drug trafficking — the trafficking of drugs, but also of arms and people — and associated crime, corruption and violence. The Council had already imparted a sense of urgency late last year, and we all have acted.

Based on decisions taken at by the Council and subsequently by a conference on Guinea Bissau, held in Lisbon last December, UNODC has moved quickly to provide assistance: our project office has been established, staff are on the ground and last week we signed a project to disburse European Union funds, a point to which Mr. Omoregie has already referred.

The Government of Guinea-Bissau has responded in kind and proactively. It has strengthened the legal basis for fighting drugs and crime by ratifying the United Nations Conventions against Transnational Organized Crime and against Corruption. It has put in place management structures for the oversight and implementation of the anti-narcotic and organized crime emergency plan. As Guinea-Bissau is still lacking suitable criminal and procedural codes, we shall concentrate on those areas with immediate intervention.

What about the future? In the near term, those measures will enable the implementation of the operational plan prepared by the Government of Guinea-Bissau, with our assistance, to combat illicit trafficking through its land, air and sea corridors and strengthen the administration of justice and the rule of law.

A year ago, in a similar briefing to this Council, I reported on the state of disarray of the Guinea-Bissau prison system. We are grateful to the Peacebuilding Commission, particularly to Ambassador Viotti, for dealing with the most urgent needs of the Ministry of Justice of Guinea-Bissau. The Peacebuilding Fund has approved an urgent project on prison rehabilitation. Thanks to that and the support of Portugal, Germany and the United Kingdom, the central prison in Bissau and three provincial detention centres are being refurbished. The reform of the penitentiary administration through the modernization of its data management system, proper legislation, the training of staff and the improvement of the human rights culture in the country, is under way.

Also under way are the training and equipping of a special counter-narcotics task force of the judicial police, with resources provided, through my office, by Italy and the European Union, in addition to bilateral support from Brazil, Portugal and the United Kingdom. That will help tackle the drug trafficking problem by mainstreaming it into the wider security sector reform process and generally into the work of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS), ably led by the Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Omoregie. That is a good example of the United Nations delivering as one.

Like anywhere else, organized crime can best be neutralized by a strong and efficient judicial system. I invite those present to help strengthen the capacity of the Guinea-Bissau judicial system to prosecute organized crime, particularly drug trafficking, with the aim of having a core group of good and honest prosecutors and judges.

Before closing, I would like to say a few words about the medium term. Programmes for a more distant future are to be planned after the new Government is in place, following the November elections. Representative Omoregie spoke at length about that. With the assistance of INTERPOL, we are developing a counter-narcotics intelligence-sharing platform for the region and between West Africa and Europe. The model being applied is one we have tested with excellent results in other geographical theatres, for example in West Asia, and for other forms of crime, modelled for example, on the European Commission/European Police Office regional programme against the smuggling of migrants by organized crime groups.

In general, whether bilateral or multilateral assistance is provided, we need to act together and address the problems of the country and the region together. A priority is to strengthen international legal cooperation in the whole of West Africa through extradition, mutual legal assistance and the confiscation of the proceeds of crime. That is the message we have all heard from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa, Ambassador Djinnit. His call is another alarm bell, and it is loud and clear.

In that perspective, together with the Economic Community of West African States and the United Nations Office for West Africa, we are preparing for a ministerial conference on narcotic trafficking and organized crime in West Africa, scheduled to be held in Praia next October. It is meant to establish a regional platform to strengthen border controls and the judicial

system's resistance to drug trafficking. It will raise the threshold of risk for criminals, money launderers and corrupt officials.

In conclusion, the drug trafficking problem through Guinea-Bissau is still relatively small by the standards of West Asia, the Caribbean or Central America, but it is growing exponentially and threatening to turn the region into an epicentre of lawlessness and instability. That is the last thing that Africa needs. By working together now, we may still act in a preventive mode. Any day or week lost may have dramatic consequences for the future of the region, adding a security crisis in a part of the world already facing mass poverty, hunger and despair.

The President: I thank Mr. Costa for his briefing.

I give the floor to Mrs. Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti, Chair of the Guinea-Bissau configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission and Permanent Representative of Brazil.

Mrs. Viotti: I would like to thank you, Sir, for the invitation to participate in today's meeting.

Since the end of March, when I addressed this Council on the work of the country-specific configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission for Guinea-Bissau, we have been able to gain a better understanding of the situation in the country and the main challenges for the consolidation of peace.

Last April, a Peacebuilding Commission delegation visited Guinea-Bissau and established direct contact with Government officials, international partners, members of Parliament, civil society and the private sector. It also had the opportunity to visit sites in Bissau and in the interior of the country.

The configuration for Guinea-Bissau has been holding thematic discussions on key areas for the consolidation of peace. Those meetings have proved useful in identifying gaps in ongoing programmes and assessing the possible contribution of the Commission through a continuous and fruitful interaction with the Government and representatives of civil society.

The discussions have involved issues related to the preparations for the upcoming legislative elections, public administration reform, the reactivation of the economy, the strengthening of the justice sector and the consolidation of the rule of law, youth employment, security sector reform and the fight against drug trafficking. The series of thematic meetings will be completed next week when a discussion on infrastructure, in particular energy, will be held.

Meanwhile, the Government and other stakeholders are preparing an integrated strategic framework for peacebuilding. We will shortly launch consultations with members of the country-specific configuration on the basis of such a document so as to finalize the strategy as soon as possible. It is worth noting that the strategic framework for peacebuilding is not an end in itself, but a means to bring about a significant improvement in the stability of the country and to create the conditions for it to embark on a path of growth and development.

Without prejudging the conclusions and recommendations to be decided upon by the Guinea-Bissau configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, I would like to touch upon some of the main challenges that need to be addressed and that require substantial support from the international community.

One of the immediate concerns is the organization of the parliamentary elections to be held in November. In spite of recent contributions by bilateral partners and the United Nations Development Programme, there is still a considerable financial gap to be filled. Needless to say, a successful election process is a precondition for the maintenance of political stability and for the consolidation of democracy in the country. The international community should also assist Guinea-Bissau in turning the electoral process into an opportunity for a broad-based dialogue on the country's challenges and possible solutions.

By the same token, despite the contributions already raised after the Lisbon conference last year, Guinea-Bissau still lacks the resources necessary to fight drug trafficking in an effective manner. With the support of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime — and here I want to acknowledge and appreciate the leadership of Mr. Antonio Maria Costa — and bilateral partners, the Government has taken important initial steps to implement the anti-narcotics operational plan.

However, further assistance is badly needed. During the field trip and in our thematic discussion on this issue, we noticed with concern the precarious conditions of police and security forces, which lack the

most basic means and adequate human resources. The country needs to build capacity in order to ensure control of its more than 80 islands, its maritime borders and its airspace, and to strengthen its judicial and penal systems. The efforts to address drug trafficking and related crimes would benefit from a regional approach, given the transnational nature of the challenges in this area, as has been stressed by both Mr. Omoregie and Mr. Antonio Maria Costa.

Efforts in the fight against drug trafficking must be combined with measures to reactivate the economy. On the one hand, it is imperative to combat illicit activities; on the other, it is necessary to set the country on a path to a functioning economy, in which the creation of job opportunities and income forestall the possibility that drug trafficking infiltrates more deeply into society.

Security sector reform continues to be a matter of priority for the Government of Guinea-Bissau. Recent developments in this area, such as the conclusion of the military census, are encouraging. The support that will be provided by the European Security and Defence Policy Mission, and the provision of financial and technical assistance by various partners are crucial. However, the reform plan remains seriously under-funded. In our discussions, the reintegration aspect of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) was emphasized. It is interesting to note that this point was made, not only by Governmental authorities, but also by civil society representatives. It was stressed that previous attempts at DDR failed due to lack of attention to reintegration. It was also felt that adequate and careful planning for reinsertion into society of the demobilized contingent will be a key factor in ensuring a successful reform.

In the economic field, the Government is committed to controlling fiscal expenditures and promoting further reforms in public administration, following the emergency post-conflict assistance programme signed with the International Monetary Fund earlier this year. However, a weak fiscal basis, compounded by the recent difficulties resulting from the rise in fuel and food prices, continues to hamper the Government's ability to pay salaries and provide basic services to the population. In particular, the external debt and its associated interest payments constitute a huge burden to the Government. Creative solutions should be considered, taking into consideration the specific needs of Guinea-Bissau as a fragile country emerging from conflict, so that its population could benefit from the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative with the urgency that the situation requires.

During our field trip to Guinea-Bissau and in our interactions with different stakeholders, we noticed the considerable economic potential of the country. Much can be done to add value to the main export product, cashew nuts. Fertile lands and abundant rain can be used for food crops, in particular rice, which the country used to export. The current food crisis, in spite of its worrisome consequences in the short term — Mr. Omoregie has already referred to the social tensions that are occurring as we speak — could be turned into an opportunity if agricultural production were reactivated and diversified through adequate support.

In doing so, it is also necessary to help the Government overcome the structural bottlenecks that currently impede economic recovery. Such measures include updating legal frameworks, creating an enabling environment for the private sector, establishing a sound banking and financial system, including through incentives to microcredit schemes and, last but not least, rehabilitating the infrastructure, especially in the energy sector. As we witnessed with our own eyes, the country today is literally in the dark. It needs the support of the international community to lighten up the prospects for a more promising future, when its people will finally enjoy the dividends of peace.

We were pleased at the approval by the steering committee, recently established in Guinea-Bissau, of four projects to be financed by the Peacebuilding Fund. The resources made available will be used to reform prisons and military barracks, invest in youth employment and support the organization of the elections. By doing so, the Fund starts to fulfil its mandate of providing catalytic money to the most urgent and needy sectors. Most important, it puts into practice the concept of a two-track approach, in an attempt to combine strategic long-term analysis with short-term projects that could have a direct and immediate impact in the country. We hope a new and more substantial allocation of resources could be announced soon, as the country-specific configuration finalizes the strategic framework for peacebuilding in Guinea-Bissau.

Finally, allow me to join the Secretary-General in his recommendation concerning the United Nations presence on the ground. The engagement of the Commission is a time-consuming and work-intensive enterprise and involves a stronger support from the Organization to the country. Let me take this opportunity to express appreciation to the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau, under the able leadership of Mr. Shola Omoregie, and the United Nations country team, coordinated by Ms. Giuseppina Mazza, for their commendable work in assisting the country-specific configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission for Guinea-Bissau. The Commission is also fortunate to count on the Peacebuilding Support Office, whose dedication and commitment is praiseworthy. I am particularly grateful to Carolyn McAskie, Ejeviome Eloho Otobo, and Philip Helminger for their continuous and invaluable support.

The President: I thank Ambassador Viotti for her briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of Guinea-Bissau.

Mr. Cabral (Guinea-Bissau) (*spoke in French*): I am grateful to the members of the Council for offering me this opportunity. I would first thank the Representative of the Secretary-General in Guinea-Bissau for having introduced the Secretary-General's report (S/2008/395) and also for the additional information which he brought to the Council's attention.

Like the Secretary-General, and like most of the citizens of Guinea-Bissau, I, too, feel that notable progress has been made in my country. In spite of all the difficulties we are facing, we are determined to move forward so that peace and stability can become reality in my country and so that we can finally focus on much more crucial questions, such as the socio-economic development in our country. I observe, as the Secretary-General did in his report, that there is further room for work; there are serious problems that persist and the authorities in Guinea-Bissau have to make more of an effort, so that, as a nation, we can muster all the energy to work together in an inclusive democracy.

However, as is recognized in the report we still need the unwavering support of the international community. Without that support, it will not be possible, despite of our resolve, in spite of our will and in spite our clear awareness of our prime responsibility as citizens of Guinea-Bissau, it simply will not be possible to meet all of the challenges we face because they are so numerous.

Without taking too much of the Council's time, I would like to acknowledge that we have to solidify democracy in our country. Mr. Omoregie indicated earlier that everything is being done in order for the elections to take place, as announced on 16 November. He just explained the remaining difficulties to the Council. I, too, would like to appeal to the international community so that the requisite financial support be given as soon as possible so that all of the steps can be covered leading up to that crucial date of 16 November.

I should also like to thank Mr. Costa for his report, and in particular for all the aid that the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has been giving Guinea-Bissau. That support is crucial. We are facing enormous difficulties because the challenge is tremendous. We are a small country, the weak link in the subregional chain, with drugs being a subregional problem. That dimension has, fortunately, been recognized not only by Guinea-Bissau, but by all countries in the West African region, as well as by our international partners.

We are making efforts. We have already made considerable progress, but more has to be done. As I said earlier, we are the weak link in the chain. Drug traffickers know full well that, so long as Guinea-Bissau does not have the means to combat that scourge, which, as Mr. Costa said when he referred to metastasis, is a real cancer. It is a terrifying cancer that has to be fought rapidly with effective means so that drugs, which we never had in our country until 2005, do not hinder our country's socio-economic development. Thus, I should like to thank Mr. Costa for all his efforts and for all the help he has given to my country.

Finally, I should like once again to thank our colleague from Brazil, the Chair of the Guinea-Bissau configuration, for her praiseworthy efforts, working together with other members of the configuration, because we have been able to make great progress. Earlier, she referred to the visit to my country, thanks to which it was possible to observe the situation there and to make contact not only with the national

authorities, but also with civil society and private citizens, to take the pulse and to see exactly what is happening in the country. That visit made it possible not only to identify the many challenges, but also to see that we have reason for hope in my country. We are resolved to move forward and not to be discouraged in our effort to create all the conditions necessary to promote human rights and the rule of law so that our democracy can be a truly inclusive democracy, allowing all citizens to be involved in and to manage our national affairs.

I should like once again to thank members of the Council for their focused attention to my country and above all for their willingness, through an appeal to the international community, to provide substantial support and assistance to my country as soon as possible.

The President: There are no further speakers on my list. In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I should now like to invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at noon.